The CZAR'S SPY

The Mystery of a Silent Love

by Chevalier WILLIAM LE QUEUX

AUTHOR of "THE CLOSED BOOK," ETC.

ILLUSTRATIONS by C. D. RHODES

SYNOPSIS.

—10—

Gordon Gregg, dining aboard with Hornby, the yacht Lola's owner, accidentally sees a torn photograph of a young girl. That night the consul's safe is robbed. The police find that Hornby is a fraud and the Lola's name a false one. In London Gregg is trapped nearly to his death by a former servant, Olinto. Visiting in Dumfries Gregg meets Muriel Leithcourt. Hornby appears and Muriel introduces him as Martin Woodroffe, her father's friend. Gregg sees a copy of the torn photograph on the Lola and finds that the young girl is Muriel's friend. Woodroffe disappears. Gregg discovers the body of a murdered woman in Rannoch wood. The body disappears and in its place is found the body of Olinto. Muriel and Gregg search Rannoch wood together, and find the body of Armida, Olinto's wife. When the police go to the wood the body has disappeared. In London Gregg meets Olinto, alive and well. Gregg traces the young girl of the torn photograph, and finds that she is Elma Heath, niece of Baron Oberg, who has taken her to Abo, Finland, and that she holds a secret affecting Woodroffe. On his return to Rannoch Gregg finds the Leithcourts fled from Hylton Chater, who had called there. He goes to Abo, and after a tilt with the police chief, is conducted to the place where Elma is imprisoned.

CHAPTER XI.

The Castle of the Terror.

The big Finn rowed me down the swollen river.

After nearly a mile, the stream again opened out into a broad lake where, in the distance, I saw rising sheer and high from the water, a long square building of three stories, with a tall round tower at one corner—an old medieval castle it seemed to be. From one of the small windows of the tower, as we came into view of it, a light was shining upon the water, and my guide seeing it, grunted in satisfaction. It had undoubtedly been placed there as signal. After waiting five minutes or so, he pulled straight across the lake to the high, dark tower that descended into the water. The place was as grim and silent as any I had ever seen, an impregnable stronghold of the days before siege guns were invented, the fortress of some feudal prince or count who had probably held the surrounding country in thraldom. A small wooden ledge and half a dozen steps led up to a low arched door, which opened noiselessly, and the dark figure of a woman stood peering forth.

My guide uttered some reassuring word in Finnish in a low half-whisper, and then slowly pushed the boat along to the ledge, saying:

"Your high nobility may disembark. There is at present no danger."

I rose, gripped a big rusty chain to steady myself, and climbed into the narrow doorway in the ponderous wall, where I found myself in the darkness beside the female who had apparently been expecting our arrival and watching our signal.

Without a word she led me through a short passage, and then, striking a match, lit a big old-fashioned lantern. As the light fell upon her I recognized that she was a member of some religious order. The thin ascetic countenance was that of a woman of strong character, and her funereal habit seemed much too large for her stunted, shrunken figure.

"The sister speaks French?" I hazarded in that language, knowing that in most convents throughout Europe French is known.

"Oui, m'sieur. But are you not afraid to venture here? No strangers are permitted here, you know. If your presence was discovered you would not leave this place alive—so I warn you. By admitting you I am betraying my trust, and that I should not have done were it not compulsory."

"Compulsory! How?"

"The order of the chief of police. Even here, we cannot afford to offend him."

So the fellow Boranski had really kept faith with me, and at his order the closed door of the convent had been opened.

"Of course not," I answered. "Russian officialdom is all-powerful in Finland nowadays. But where is the lady?"

"You are still prepared to risk your liberty and life?" she asked in a hoarse voice, full of grim meaning.

"I am," I said. "Lead me to her."

"You are on Russian soil now, m'sieur, not English," she remarked in her broken English. "If your object were known, you would never be spared to return to your own land. Ah!" she sighed, "you do not know the mysteries and terrors of Finland. I am a French subject, born in Tours, and brought to Helsingfors when I was fifteen. I have been in Finland forty-five years. Once we were happy here, but since the czar appointed Baron Oberg to be governor general—" and she shrugged her shoulders without finishing her sentence.

"Baron Oberg—governor general of Finland!" I gasped.

"Certainly. Did you not know?" she said, dropping into French. "It is four years now that he has held supreme power to crush and Russify these poor Finns. Ah, m'sieur! this country, once so prosperous, is a blot upon the face of Europe. His methods are the worst and most unscrupulous of any employed by Russia. Before he came here he was the best hated man in Petersburg, and that, they say, is why the emperor sent him to us."

"Where does this baron live?" I asked, surprised that he should occupy so high a place in Russian officialdom—the representative of the czar, with powers as great as the emperor himself.

"At the Government palace, in Helsingfors."

"And Elma Heath is here—in this grim fortress! Why?"

"Ah, m'sieur, how can I tell? By reason of family secrets, perhaps. They account for so much, you know."

The fact that the baron was ruler of Finland amazed me, for I had half expected him to be some clever adventurer. Yet as the events of the past flashed through my brain, I recollected that in Rannoch Wood had been found the miniature of the Russian Order of Saint Anne, a distinction which, in all probability, had been conferred upon him. If so, the coincidence, to say the least, was a remarkable one. I questioned my companion further regarding the baron.

"Ah, m'sieur," she declared, "they call him 'The Strangler of the Finns.' It was he who ordered the peasants of Kasko to be flogged until four of them died—and the czar gave him the Star of White Eagle for it—he who suppressed half the newspapers and put eighteen editors in prison for publishing a report of a meeting of the Swedes in Helsingfors; he who encourages corruption and bribery among the officials for the furtherance of Russian interests; he who has ordered Russian to be the official language, who has restricted public education, who has overtaxed and ground down the people until now the mine is laid, and Finland is ready for open revolt. The prisons are filled with the innocent; women are flogged; the poor are starving, and 'The Strangler,' as they call him, reports to the czar that Finland is submissive and is Russianized!"

I had heard something of this abominable state of affairs from time to time from the English press, but had never taken notice of the name of the oppressor. So the uncle of Elma Heath was "The Strangler of Finland," the man who, in four years, had reduced a prosperous country to a state of ruin and revolt!

"Cannot I see her at once?" I asked, feeling that we had remained too long there. If my presence in that place was perilous the sooner I escaped from it the better.

"Yes, come," she said. "But silence! Walk softly," and holding up the old horn lantern to give me light, she led me out into the low stone corridor again, conducting me through a number of intricate passages, all bare and gloomy, the stones worn hollow by the feet of ages, into a small, square chamber, the floor of which was carpeted, and where, suspended high above, was a lamp that shed but a faint light over the barely-furnished place. Beyond was another smaller room into which the old nun disappeared for a moment; then she came forth leading a strange wan little figure in a gray gown, a figure whose face was the most perfect and most lovely I had ever seen. Her wealth of chestnut hair fell disheveled about her shoulders, and as her hands were clasped before her she looked straight at me in surprise as she was led towards me.

She walked but feebly, and her countenance was deathly pale. Her dress, as she came beneath the lamp, was, I saw, coarse, yet clean, and her beautiful, regular features, which in her photograph had held me in such fascination, were even more sweet and more matchless than I had believed them to be. I stood before her dumfounded in admiration.

In silence she bowed gracefully, and then looked at me with astonishment, apparently wondering what I, a perfect stranger, required of her.

"Miss Elma Heath, I presume?" I exclaimed at last. "May I introduce myself to you? My name is Gordon Gregg, English by birth, cosmopolitan by instinct. I have come here to ask you a question—a question that concerns myself. Lydia Moreton has sent me to you."

I noticed that her great brown eyes watched my lips and not my face.

Her own lips moved, but she looked at me with an inexpressible sadness. No sound escaped her.

I stood rigid before her as one turned to stone, for in that instant, in a flash indeed, I realized the awful truth.

She was both deaf and dumb!

She raised her clasped hands to me in silence, yet with tears welling in her splendid eyes. I saw that upon her wrists were a pair of bright steel gyves.

"What is this place?" I demanded of the woman in the religious habit, when I recovered from the shock of the poor girl's terrible affliction. "Where am I?"

"This is the Castle of Kajana—the criminal lunatic asylum of Finland," was her answer. "The prisoner, as you see, has lost both speech and hearing."

"Deaf and dumb!" I cried, looking at the beautiful original of that destroyed photograph on board the Lola. "But she has not always been so!"

"No. I think not always," replied the sister quietly.

"But she can write responses to my questions?"

"Alas! no," was the old woman's whispered reply. "Her mind is affected. She is, unfortunately, a hopeless lunatic."

I looked straight into those sad, wide-open, yet unflinching brown eyes utterly confounded.

Those white wrists held in steel, that pale face and blanched lips, the inertness of her movements, all told their own tragic tale. And yet that letter I had read, dictated in secret most probably because her hands were not free, was certainly not the outpourings of a madwoman. She had spoken of death, it was true, yet was it not to be supposed that she was slowly being driven to suicide? She had kept her secret, and she wished the man Hornby—the man who was to marry Muriel Leithcourt—to know.

The room in which we stood was evidently an apartment set apart for her use, for beyond was the tiny bedchamber; yet the small, high-up window was closely barred, and the cold bareness of the prison was sufficient indeed to cause anyone confined there to prefer death to captivity.

Again I spoke to her slowly and kindly, but there was no response. That she was absolutely dumb was only too apparent. Yet surely she had not always been so! I had gone in search of her because the beauty of her portrait had magnetized me, and I had now found her to be even more lovely than her picture, yet, alas! suffering from an affliction that rendered her life a tragedy. The realization of the terrible truth staggered me. Such a perfect face as hers I had never before set eyes upon, so beautiful, so clear-cut, so refined, so eminently the countenance of one well-born, and yet so ineffably sad, so full of blank unutterable despair.

She placed her clasped hands to her mouth and made signs by shaking her head that she could neither understand nor respond. I took my wallet from my pocket and wrote upon a piece of paper in a large hand the words: "I come from Lydia Moreton. My name is Gordon Gregg."

When her eager gaze fell upon the words she became instantly filled with

She Raised Her Clasped Hands to Me in Silence.

excitement, and nodded quickly. Then holding her steel-clasped wrists towards me she looked wistfully at me, as though imploring me to release her from the awful bondage in that silent tomb.

Though the woman who had led me there endeavored to prevent it, I handed her the pencil, and placed the paper on the table for her to write.

The nun tried to snatch it up, but I held her arm gently and forcibly, saying in French:

"No. I wish to see if she is really insane. You will at least allow me this satisfaction."

And while we were in altercation, Elma, with the pencil in her fingers, tried to write, but by reason of her hands being bound so closely was unable. At length, however, after several attempts, she succeeded in printing in uneven capitals the response:

"I know you. You were on the yacht. I thought they killed you."

The thin-faced old woman saw her response—a reply that was surely rational enough—and her brows contracted with displeasure.

"Why are you here?" I wrote, not allowing the sister to get sight of my question.

In response, she wrote painfully and laboriously:

"I am condemned for a crime I did not commit. Take me from here, or I shall kill myself."

"Ah!" exclaimed the old woman. "You see, poor girl, she believes herself innocent! They all do."

"But why is she here?" I demanded fiercely.

"I do not know, m'sieur. It is not my duty to inquire the history of their crimes. When they are ill I nurse them; that is all."

"And who is the commandant of this fortress?"

"Colonel Smirnoff. If he knew that I had admitted you, you would never leave this place alive. This is the Schusselburg of Finland—the place of imprisonment for those who have conspired against the state."

"The prison of political conspirators, eh?"

"Alas, m'sieur, yes! The place in which some of the poor creatures are tortured in order to obtain confessions and information with as much cruelty as in the black days of the Inquisition. These walls are thick, and their cries are not heard from the oubliettes below the lake."

I had long ago heard of the horrors of Schusselburg. Indeed who has not heard of them who has traveled in Russia? The very mention of the modern bastile on Lake Ladoga, where no prisoner has ever been known to come forth alive, is sufficient to cause any Russian to turn pale. And I was in the Schusselburg of Finland!

I turned over the sheet of paper and wrote the question: "Did Baron Oberg send you here?"

In response, she printed the words: "I believe so. I was arrested in Helsingfors. Tell Lydia where I am."

"Do you know Muriel Leithcourt?" I inquired by the same means, whereupon she replied that they were at school together.

"Did you see me on board the Lola?" I wrote.

"Yes. But I could not warn you, although I had overheard their intentions. They took me ashore when you had gone, to Siena. After three days I found myself deaf and dumb—I was made so."

"Who did it?"

"A doctor, I suppose. People who said they were my friends put me under chloroform."

I turned to the woman in the religious habit, and cried: "A shameful mutilation has been committed upon this poor defenseless girl! And I will make it my duty to discover and punish the perpetrators of it."

"Ah, m'sieur. Do not act rashly, I pray of you," the woman said seriously, placing her hand upon my arm. "Recollect you are in Finland—where the Baron Oberg is all-powerful."

"I do not fear the Baron Oberg," I exclaimed. "If necessary, I will appeal to the czar himself. Mademoiselle is kept here for the reason that she is in possession of some secret. She must be released—I will take the responsibility."

"But you must not try to release her from here. It would mean death to you both. The Castle of Kajana tells no secrets of those who die within its walls, or of those cast headlong into its waters and forgotten."

Again I turned to Elma, who stood in anxious wonder of the subject of our conversation, and had suddenly taken the old nun's hand and kissed it affectionately, perhaps in order to show me that she trusted her.

Then upon the paper I wrote: "Is the Baron Oberg your uncle?"

She shook her head in the negative, showing that the dreaded governor general of Finland had only acted a part towards her in which she had been compelled to concur.

"Who is Philip Hornby?" I inquired, writing rapidly.

"My friend—at least, I believe so."

Friend! And I had all along believed him to be an adventurer and an enemy!

"Why did you go to Leghorn?" I asked.

"For a secret purpose. There was a plot to kill you, only I managed to thwart them," were the words she printed with much labor.

"Then I owe my life to you," I wrote. "And in return I will do my utmost to rescue you from here, if you do not fear to place yourself in my hands."

And to this she replied: "I shall be thankful, for I cannot bear this awful place longer. I believe they must torture the women here. They will torture me some day. Do your best to get me out of here and I will tell you everything. But," she wrote, "I fear you can never secure my release. I am confined here on a life sentence."

"But you are English, and if you have had no trial I can complain to our ambassador."

"No, I am a Russian subject. I was born in Russia, and went to England when I was a girl."

That altered the case entirely. As a subject of the czar in her own country she was amenable to that disgraceful blot upon civilization that allows a person to be consigned to prison at the will of a high official, without trial or without being afforded any opportunity of appeal. I therefore at once saw a difficulty.

Yet she promised to tell me the truth if I could but secure her release!

Could I allow this refined defenseless girl to remain an inmate of that bastile, the terrors of which I had heard men in Russia hint at with bated breath? They had willfully maimed her and deprived her of both hearing and the power of speech, and now they intended that she should be driven mad by that silence and loneliness that must always end in insanity.

"I have decided," I said suddenly, turning to the woman who had conducted me there, and having now removed the steel bonds of the prisoner with a key she secretly carried, stood with folded hands in the calm attitude of the religieuse.

"You will not act with rashness?" she implored in quick apprehension. "Remember, your life is at stake, as well as my own."

"Her enemies intended that I, too, should die!" I answered, looking straight into those deep mysterious brown eyes which held me as beneath a spell. "They have drawn her into their power because she had no means of defense. The man is awaiting me in the boat outside. I intend to take her with me."

"But, m'sieur, why that is impossible!" cried the old woman in a hoarse voice. "If you were discovered by the guards who patrol the lake both night and day they would shoot you both."

"I will risk it," I said, and linking my arm in that of the woman whose lovely countenance had verily become the sun of my existence, I made a sign, inviting her to accompany me.

The sister barred the door, urging me to reconsider my decision, but I waved her aside.

Elma recognized my intentions in a moment, and allowed herself to be conducted down the long intricate corridor, walking stealthily, and as we crept along on tiptoe I felt the girl's grip upon my arm, a grip that told me that she placed her faith in me as her deliverer.

Without a sound we crept forward until within a few yards from that unlocked door where the boat awaited us below, when, of a sudden, the uncertain light of the lantern fell upon something that shone and a deep voice cried out of the darkness in Russian:

"Halt! or I fire!"

And, startled, we found ourselves looking down the muzzle of a loaded carbine.

A huge sentry stood with his back to the secret exit, his dark eyes shining beneath his peaked cap, as he held his weapon to his shoulder within six feet of us.

"Speak!" cried the fellow. "Who are you?"

At a glance I took in the peril of the situation, and without a second's hesitation made a dive for the man beneath his weapon. He lowered it, but it was too late, for I gripped him around the waist, rendering his gun useless. It was the work of an instant, for I knew that to close with him was my only chance.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

REFUSED TO EAT MATCHES

Experiment Proved That Rats and Mice Have Been Unjustly Accused of Causing Fires.

Rats, mice and matches have long been considered a source of fires. An investigator, however, after extensive experiment, reports, in Safety Engineering, that there is no real foundation for the popular idea. A large number of rats were caught at different times and confined in cages with the ends open for observation. Matches were then placed in the cages, but no food, and the rats were left in a quiet spot in a cellar. In every case the animals starved to death or ate their companions. Not a match head or splint was gnawed. The matches were well seasoned and of different varieties from the strike-on-the-box to the double-tip and the common parlor match. A second series of tests was conducted in a cage measuring more than six feet square. The results were the same.

In all cases the rats were without food from two to three days, then the matches were introduced and the rats died from starvation within one to five days after. Like experiments were conducted with mice and the same results obtained, the mice being hungry from two to three days, then the matches were introduced and death followed in one to five days. In the larger cages the rats were fed for periods varying from twenty to forty-four days in order to permit the animals to become accustomed to their surroundings and act normally. A greater variety of matches was used in this test. The rats were imprisoned together in this case and many were gnawed and eaten by their companions.

These Fish Need Ladders.

Salmon seeking to scale the impounding wall at Gibraltar dam, on the Santa Ynez river, to reach the upper canyons and spawn, are reported to be exhausting their strength and will die.

The city has reared a wall over ten feet above the bed of the stream, over which the water is flowing. On the top of the wall is a slight shelving where the fish, seeking to make the long leap, land, and they are carried by the flow back down the stream again.

Engineer Pyzel, who is in charge of the city's reservoir works, reports he has watched dozens of big salmon or salmon trout try to make the leap and fail, and he is of the opinion that all will eventually die. When the impounding wall was built the city did not provide for a fish ladder, hence the trouble.—Santa Barbara Dispatch to Los Angeles Times.

Florence Nightingale's Statue.

"The Lady With the Lamp," statue of Florence Nightingale, has been unveiled without ceremonial, in Waterloo place, London. The statue stands high on a red and gray granite pedestal, and makes a notable and an appropriate addition to Waterloo place. By its side, fully harmonizing with it in general outline, is that of Sidney Herbert. The effective background for both is the Crimean memorial. The sculptor portrayed his subject in a sympathetic pose, standing in the voluminous skirt of the early Victorian period, with the lamp borne in the right hand. This statue of "The Lady With the Lamp" is the first public statue of a woman in London other than those of royal ladies.

Hard Luck, Indeed.

"What is a fellow to do, I'd like to know?" complained John. "The kids that mamma don't object to me playing with all have mammas that won't let them play with me."

COW'S MILK TRANSPARENT.

This Is Not a Delusion, Either, but Merely a Dilution.

Old Capt. Joshua Ketcham, who recently died at Amityville, L. I., was much respected and beloved by the summer residents who used to sail with him on the bay and catch bluefish. There was always a refreshing flavor of the sea in his talk.

One day when a party of city men were sailing with him the conversation turned on the difficulty of getting good, fresh milk in Amityville, and they appealed to the captain to know why.

"Well," said Captain Joshua, "it's been that way as long as I can remember. My wife made be buy a cow once. I bought her from Elbert Haff up on the north turnpike and gave him $40 for her. Elbert said she'd give twenty quarts of milk a day, and I guess she did, but you could see bottom in six fathoms."—Youth's Companion.

The Mother Instinct.

At the close of his talk before a Sunday school the bishop invited questions.

A tiny boy, with a white, eager face, at once held up his hand.

"Please, sir," said he, "why was Adam never a baby?"

The bishop coughed in doubt as to what answer to give, but a little girl, the eldest of several brothers and sisters, came promptly to his aid.

"Please, sir," she added smartly, "there was nobody to nuss him."—London Tit-Bits.

Looking for a Bargain.

Ikey Rosenbaum had collected three dozen eggs, which he offered to a dispenser of soft drinks for a dollar. When the eggs were counted it was found that there were thirty-seven.

"Vot vill you gif me for der vonover?" asked Ikey.

"I'll treat you to a drink," said the purchaser.

"All right," said Ikey. "I'll haf an egg and milk."—Boston Transcript.

Shoot, George!

"Gee, but business is rotten!" said the thin man as he addressed the fat man on the rear platform of the car. "I am laying off hands every day."

"That's funny," returned the fat man. "I'm putting on hands every day."

"What business are you in?" asked the thin man.

"I'm a watchmaker," replied the fat man.

Pointed Criticism.

Theodore Dreiser, the novelist, was talking of criticism.

"I like pointed criticism," he said, "criticism such as I heard in the lobby of a theater the other night at the end of the play.

"The critic was an old gentleman. His criticism, which was for his wife's ears alone, consisted of these words:

"'Well, you would come'."—Kansas City Times.

Sure, She Knew.

Mabel was explaining the baseball game to Estelle.

"What makes the man with the bat in his hand keep waiving it around like that?" inquired Estelle.

"Why, you silly goose," answered Mabel, "he does that so the pitcher can't hit it, of course."

Happened Off Duty.

Employe—Sir, I would respectfully ask you for an increase of salary; I have got married lately.

Manager—Very sorry, Horneyhand, I can be of no assistance to you. The company is not responsible for any accident that happens to its employes when off duty.—Birmingham Age-Herald.

A Substitute.

We gazed pityingly on the listless drug store clerk leaning against the soda counter.

"Haven't you any ambition?" we queried, kindly and all that.

"No," he replied, with brightening intelligence, "but I have something just as good."—Newbrush Journal.

Making George Stand It.

Crabshaw—I've no objection to your getting married, my dear; but I really can't stand the expense of a wedding.

Marjorie—I'll try to help you out, papa. Perhaps I can throw a scarce into George and get him to propose an elopement.—Judge.

Something Just as Good.

"That telephone girl was polite, I must say."

"How so?"

"Couldn't give me the number I wanted, but offered me my choice of several other nice numbers."

Stage Note.

"Villain, I defy you," said the heroine, drawing herself to her full height. "Do your worst."

"Don't ask him to do that, Miss," pleaded a voice from the gallery. "His acting is bad enough as it is."